

Famagusta during the Great War: From Backwater to Bustling

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This paper explores how Famagusta went from a backwater of the British Empire before 1915 to becoming a bustling military, humanitarian, and economic base of the British and French war effort from 1916. The paper briefly establishes how Cyprus was a backwater of the British Empire before the First World War and then proceeds to focus on how the war transformed Famagusta – the city and the district. It became the base for recruiting Cypriot muleteers for the British Salonika Force; at Monarga there was the camp for the French Armenian Legion; at Karaolos the home for Ottoman Prisoners of War; and it became vital to British and French naval intelligence particularly for counter-intelligence purposes. These wartime roles, amongst others, impacted greatly on the inhabitants. John Keegan has argued that war is a reflection of the societies that wage it and vice versa, and for the Cypriots of Famagusta the war provided new economic opportunities, but also challenged their loyalties. It placed restrictions on their freedoms, yet less so than on that of their neighbours, especially the Egyptians. Ultimately, the war irrevocably changed Famagusta from a quiet backwater to a bustling base.